

Joe Tolve  
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203-355-0919

RE: House Bill 6380

Dear Members of the Human Services Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee:

I am writing in regards to House Bill 6380, An Act Concerning the Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2013. As a blind client served by BESB (the Board of Education and Services for the Blind), I strongly object to such a maneuver. BESB is the oldest agency serving blind people in the country, and is considered a model agency by many states. Overall consumer satisfaction with the agency is 84% (2009 survey). At approximately 50%, the unemployment rate for blind people of working age in CT is 25% better than the national average. At 95%, high school graduation rates for Connecticut's blind students are nearly 40% better than the national average. Seventy percent of seniors, the fastest growing population of people suffering from vision loss (due to diabetes, age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma), report increased independence and quality of life improvements after receiving services from BESB. Blind people in CT receive over 10,000 hours of assistance annually from BESB volunteers. Simply put, these figures will change drastically for the worse if BESB is consolidated into bureaucracies which have never dealt with blind people. These successes are due to being an autonomous agency with a continuum of services.

This isn't just my opinion. According to the RSA website, specialized agencies for the blind outperformed general/combined agencies in most measures of competitive employment outcomes, as well as having higher average earnings. The cost savings to the state would be minimal, especially in comparison to the hopelessness inflicted upon the lives of blind citizens in Connecticut if such a consolidation were to occur.

Remember, blindness rates are increasing. This could very easily happen to your parents. It could easily be you. I lost my sight 24 years ago, and with BESB's help I was able to rebuild my life and become a contributing member of society. I can't urge you strongly enough to kill this bill.

Please call me to discuss this anytime, 203-355-0919.  
Sincerely yours,  
Joe Tolve